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HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS: THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT KOSOVO

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HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS: THINKING ABOUT THE NEXT KOSOVO

Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon. *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000. Pp. vii – 343. Chronology, documents, maps, notes, index.)

Michael Ignatieff. *Virtual War* (Metropolitan Books: New York, 2000). Pp. 3 – 246. Notes, index.

One of the many tasks before the brand new Bush administration -- and perhaps its greatest foreign policy challenge -- is to determine how to handle the international crises that inevitably arise and seem to virtually beg for outside military intervention. It is likely, however, that like its predecessor, this foreign policy team, will delay and eventually stumble into the next intervention.

The reason is simple: there are no hard and fast rules on when and where the United States should or should not intervene around the globe. Despite the four star credentials of the new government, determining what to do is much more an art than a science, involving many moving parts including why the U.S. is intervening, whether U.S. vital interests are at stake, what our objectives are; budgetary issues, whether there is popular and Congressional support, and what the likelihood of success is.

Among the foreign policy elite, there is no consensus on whether the United States should intervene strictly when U.S. vital interests are at stake or whether a pressing humanitarian need is reason enough to send U.S. troops in harm's way. Even among the realists who posit that the U.S. should only intervene for strategic reasons of vital U.S. interest, there is not always

agreement as to what exactly constitutes U.S. vital interests when abstract statements are set aside and specific geo-political cases cited.

But while think tank types and political appointees wring their hands, I believe that most Americans today want their government to be activist, to promote the ideals of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" that founded this nation, and to help where we can. The preceding sentence can, of course, be picked apart as quickly as a recitation of our vital interests, but the fact remains, that in the age of CNN when we can no longer shut out a dying child, Americans believe that America should help. This may not be a full-out military intervention to limit suffering or death because of political oppression or state collapse, and it usually isn't. When necessary, however, the U.S. should be willing to consider committing troops for humanitarian reasons.

I would argue that humanitarian reasons for intervention are often compelling in and of themselves. Moreover, they are so intertwined with the values of the American people, that in effect, they become U.S. national interests. Even such rock-ribbed realists as former Secretary of State Alexander Haig argue that U.S. vital interests are not the only reason to intervene. During a recent address, Haig noted that:

> …for Americans, the national interest is not simply a calculation of material interests but also a moral one. After all, we do stand for certain values: democracy, respect for individual rights, the settling of disputes through diplomacy rather than force, and the rule of law not the jungle. Who of us could stand idly by if we saw our neighbors, or even a stranger, assaulted by thugs? We resent such assaults upon our values and our innate decency as a nation demands action to prevent massacres. A policy of abstention is the policy of the ostrich. The American people will simply not support for long a policy so at odds with our fundamental values.

While it is easier to make such pronouncements out of office than when one is in office and forced to deal with the consequences, the Bush administration – whether it articulates these thoughts or not – will have to deal with the consequences of American expectations. During the campaign debates, Bush did not articulate how his views regarding intervention differed from the previous Administration's beyond the usual nostrums regarding U.S interests. When reviewing the most recent interventions, Bush cited only the mission change in Somalia and the intervention in Haiti as mistakes. Since our reasons for intervening in Haiti were almost purely domestic, it is hard to imagine that a U.S. President would not intervene, particularly one whose brother would be the Governor of Florida trying to manage a major refugee crisis. If Bush were to pull U.S. troops out of Kosovo as he promised on the campaign trail, he would have to deal not only with the wrath of the Allies, but the bewilderment of the American people who thought they were saving a nation.

It is very comfortable to criticize the concept of intervention. There are many solid reasons to oppose it, and lots of people agree with the platitudes of America First. However, sticking our heads in the sand doesn't make interventions go away. Since World War II, there have been 136 cases of political violence, of which 13 are considered to be inter-state wars in the traditional sense. Clearly, the trend is intra-state violence, and U.S. military interventions mirror the trend: of the 300 uses of U.S. military force since World War II, only three have been full-scale inter-state wars, according to Marine Corps Commandant Jones. The fact of the matter is that military operations other than war, ranging from disaster relief to peace-making, is the foreseeable future for American interventions. Until either the geopolitical situation changes or America's view of itself changes, it is unlikely that we can avoid dealing with the demand for U.S. intervention.

President Bush is on the right track when he talks about the need to be humble in our relations with other nations – no one likes to be preached to. But he sends another message to the American people – and to the dispossessed all over the world -- when he trumpets America's values and America's supremacy. Bush is following in the rhetorical tradition of modern-day presidents, but such oratory – despite Bush's avowals of non-intervention -- creates expectations of the exact opposite. As it seems unlikely that the U.S. will accept mutualism as our strategic policy, that is a willingness to shed our superpower status and share tasks and power with our Allies, we need to start thinking seriously about how to make serious choices about U.S. intervention – beyond hurried decisions and emotional rhetoric. Our leaders should acknowledge that another Kosovo-like intervention is much more likely than another Gulf War, and permit the bureaucracy to work out the practical, legal and moral underpinnings for such eventualities, as well as create the force structure – and civilian structure -- to implement it. For a just cause, there is no doubt that the American people are prepared for intervention and will follow the President's lead.

The unanswered question remains what is a just cause? And how do we know when to intervene? For the purposes of this article, I will discuss only interventions for humanitarian reasons and begin by borrowing Mark Amstutz' criteria for humanitarian intervention from his excellent book *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories, and Cases in Global Politics*. Amstutz notes that while nonintervention is an important norm, dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, it is not the only norm and exceptional situations occur when other values outweigh it. Our own history is replete with examples of intervention. In the 19th and early 20th century, the

U.S. intervened in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua and Panama to variously foster domestic political order, assist U.S. business interests, keep European powers out of the region, and reinforce U.S. dominance in the region.

Amstutz states that intervention must be a method of last resort; it must be proportional, that is the good achieved must be greater than any harm produced; and there must be a reasonable hope of success. Amstutz further posits that a humanitarian intervention should be in the interest of an intervening state, when it perceives that an internal situation poses a general threat to order or a particular threat to its own economic prosperity, political influence or territorial integrity. An intervention should also be in the interests of the people and communities of the intervened state. The intervention must be justifiable by the good that it brings about to the local inhabitants.

While Amstutz' guidance is helpful, ultimately, each humanitarian intervention must not only be measured against these principles, but the practical litmus tests that all politicians apply to a particular situation. An identical atrocity may not engender the same response, due to entirely unrelated issues. Each intervention must be decided on the merits, but an informed debate beyond the foreign policy elite would do much to create a consensus on what the standards should be. It would provide a framework from which we as a nation could make decisions regarding a particular crisis, so that each crisis and potential intervention is not a first time, bottom-up operation.

Once a decision has been made to intervene, *Winning Ugly, NATO's War to Save Kosovo*, provides a number of useful lessons to apply regarding how a military intervention should proceed. The book is a classic apology of Administration actions in Kosovo written by a former NSC staffer, Ivo Daalder, and his longtime collaborator at Brookings, Michael O'Hanlon. It is well-written, easy to read, and well-documented. The authors clearly had tendous access to Administration decision-makers, and while more information will no doubt come to light, particularly from foreign sources, the book will last as a primer of immediate post-Kosovo impressions regarding our intervention there. The book begins by laying out the historical roots and immediate antecedents of the conflict between the Serbs and the Kosovars. It follows up with a discussion of the reasons for the U.S. intervention, which it applauds as valid and appropriate. And it emerges with three conclusions: It is not clear that the war could have been prevented by diplomatic means; NATO won, however ugly the process; and the victory is attributable to the combination of air strikes, the threat of a ground war, and Russian diplomacy.

From these conclusions come the central thesis of *Winning Ugly,* that while the U.S. won in Kosovo, the process was not a pretty one, and we can do better the next time. Daalder and O'Hanlon take issue with the incremental strategy that NATO took in the initial stages of the war and note that the United States (and NATO) really only committed to a full out war in June of 1999 -- over two months after the bombing started -- when the possibility of a ground war was put on the table. In the final chapter, the authors provide a number of lessons learned from the Kosovo intervention that we should apply when thinking about intervention in a future conflict, including:

- **Interventions should occur as early as possible to save the most lives as early as possible.** This is clearly easier said than done, as it is difficult to obtain political commitment before a situation is in full momentum. There can also be conflicts with "last resort" requirement. Nevertheless, once a situation is identified, for example the crisis sparked by the attacks of ethnic Albanians on Macedonia, the U.S. should act promptly. In Macedonia, with KFOR forces just over the border in Kosovo, a credible threat would go a long way. Instead, for several weeks the U.S. has been silent, leaving the field to the Ukrainians, who have potentially exacerbated the situation by providing attack helicopters and other equipment that could quickly escalate the fighting. The FRY and Greece have long wanted to carve up Macedonia. It is clearly not in the interests of the U.S. to have a NATO ally become a principal in the next Balkan War, and the U.S. has started to take action. Following the Macedonian Foreign Minister's pronouncement that the U.S. "always acts too late," Secretary Powell visited Macedonia to show U.S support in April. The U.S. has also accelerated disbursement of its annual $13.5 million in annual nonlethal assistance.

- **Coercive diplomacy requires a credible threat of force.** Using small amounts of force and declaring success as we do in Iraq and started to do in Kosovo, only serves domestic purposes, it doesn't create victory on the ground. At the beginning of the campaign, NATO believed it could force Milosevic into a negotiated settlement with a few bombing sorties. While the Alliance may not have been prepared to do more initially, the early, incremental strategy undermined NATO and caused NATO to need more force than otherwise would have been necessary to achieve its objectives, as Milosevic continued to doubt NATO resolve until the final days of the war. The Powell Doctrine's insistence on decisive force remains valid.

- **When force is used military means should be related to political ends.** NATO made the classic mistake of mismatching ends and means. NATO bombings were designed to demonstrate NATO resolve, deter Milosevic, and degrade his capabilities. We tried to achieve a political objective of stopping the killing and establishment of a durable peace with a military strategy (the air campaign) that could not prevent the killing and expulsion of the Kosovar Albanians. Daalder and O'Hanlon argue that there was a political miscalculation that a few days of bombings would be enough, but they also criticize military strategists for failing to advise leaders how their political objectives could best be met militarily. Instead the generals appear to have picked a military strategy that "was achievable by definition." (Daalder and O'Hanlon examine at some length the political restraints placed on the military, which we will not address here.)

- **Airpower alone usually cannot stop the killing in a civil war.** It didn't in Kosovo, and probably won't in future conflicts. Today, civil wars are conducted in third world countries by small units using light weapons. Trying to hit Serbian tanks from the air is going to look easy in comparison.

- **Humanitarian interventions need realistic goals.** In most cases, the immediate objective is to create and maintain a secure environment. It may not be possible to create

a perfect democracy with former enemies living together in harmony. In Kosovo, there is still a long way to go, but the situation today is better than it was before the intervention.

- **Exist strategies are desirable, but not essential.** False schedules that are not met tend to undermine our credibility at home. What is necessary are that military missions must have clear goals, as the Powell Doctrine outlines.

- **Finally, America should not be afraid to lead.** Daalder and O'Hanlon argue that the U.S., even in the Clinton years, is prone to underuse its significant power rather than overuse it. Concerned by domestic fallout and potential casualties, in Kosovo the administration delayed until the 11th hour before committing U.S. troops to implement the Rambouillet Accords. This had disasterous results: the Kosovar Albanians doubted U.S. commitment and initially refused to sign the text; Milosevic never believed the U.S. was serious and never signed the text, necessitating the intervention. U.S. tentativeness was also clear in our conduct of the war (no ground forces, no flights below 15,000 feet, no Apache helicopters). Daalder and O'Hanlon are right. The U.S. public, which is predisposed to help other countries and support its President in times of crisis, supported the intervention in Kosovo despite a shocking lack of preparation on the part of the Administration: on the eve of the first bombing strikes during his Oval Office address to the nation, President Clinton had to use a map to show the American public where Kosovo is located. While the U.S. obviously cannot and should not intervene everywhere, once we make the determination to intervene, we should do so with 100% political and military commitment.

British freelance correspondent Michael Ignatieff's *Virtual War*, comes to many of the same conclusions of *Winning Ugly*. The book provides an idiosyncratic and highly personal approach, taking us on a journey through Ignatieff's war in Kosovo: travels with Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke, a chapter of letters with a friend on the justifiability of the intervention, that unapologetically makes clear Ignatieff's own liberal leanings, another chapter on watching SACEUR Clark in action, followed by a chapter on his time with Louise Arbour, Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Ruminating on what war has become, Ignatieff gives us a breathless sense that we are in the moment, that we are players too, as we read these intimate accounts. Ultimately, however, the book doesn't hold up as a unified whole and appears to be a collection of dispatches sent in to the *London Observer* and cobbled together to form a book.

The last chapter, however, is worth the price of admission. He should have published the last chapter as a stand-alone piece, since the other chapters are entertaining, but do not support his thesis except tangentially. Part one of Ignatieff's thesis is that war has become "virtual." The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) has given us precision-guided weapons that permit war by remote control and have probably ended total warfare. War is now divorced from the people, especially those that have launched the war, in this case NATO populations. In the countries under siege, populations may be mostly protected as precision-guided weapons limit damage to what is politically acceptable. Precision-guided weapons even make the war remote for the war-fighter, Ignatieff argues, noting that in addition wars are now often fought through spin control and legal arguments.

Ignatieff states that even our values have become "virtual." We are only willing to fight for our values if we can do so with impunity. We believe in defending human rights, but not at the price of taking territory at great cost or establishing an open-ended commitment. In short, we are never in an intervention long enough to make a real difference. Finally, Ignatieff notes that the end to a virtual war is a virtual victory. We stop at the possibility of compromise, creating an ambiguous end state rather than unconditional surrender. This, in turn, sows the seeds for further discord.

The second part to Ignatieff's thesis is that virtual war is a dangerous illusion. It seems an antiseptic way of continuing politics by other means, but we need to understand that ultimately war is about violence. Only then will we commit the political will and the military forces

necessary to do the job right. Intervention should be a last resort, but when we decide to intervene, we must do so for the right reasons and with all our heart and might. Ignatieff echoes Daalder and O'Hanlon's concerns that military means must always be in sync with political goals.

From very different perspectives, the practitioner's approach of *Winning Ugly* and the moralistic view of *Virtual War*, the authors agree on much, indicating that the beginnings of a new consensus may be emerging about interventions in the new century. There is also new understanding that coupled with the awesome military powers that we possess must come a better appreciation for the damage they can wreak. While wars may appear to be virtual, the nature of war has not changed. Although it is has taken on twenty-first century disguises, war is still about violence and the shifting relationships between the Commander, the People and the Politician, as military strategist Karl von Clausewitz outlined almost two centuries ago. This basic truth is probably more evident to the Serbs and the Kosovar Albanians than it is to us so many thousand miles away, but we forget it at our own risk, as Ignatieff reminds us.

Both books -- and probably a random sampling of adults – agree that this kind of messy war is the future, and we should learn as much from the Kosovo intervention as we can. The authors believe that humanitarian intervention in the defense of human rights is an appropriate and morally right reason to intervene. Ignatieff cites British Prime Minister Blair's blunt speech in April 1999, where he argued that the NATO campaign changed the balance between human rights and state sovereignty. The Treaty of Westphalia and the UN Charter (which states that member states cannot resort to war except in self-defense) are important, but must give way in

the face of genocide or oppression. Nation-states can no longer ignore the suffering, according to Blair.

The authors of both books argue that we need to know what kind of a war we are in. In Kosovo, the Allies failed this first test that Clausewitz established so long ago. Until June 1999, we had not defined the stakes and established that we were ready to go the distance to prevail. We were engaged in what Daalder and O'Hanlon call "a foreign ministers' war," believing that coercive diplomacy in the form of air strikes would create the results we wanted. Not until a credible threat of a ground war emerged at the same time that the Russians made clear they no longer supported the Serbs, did Milosevic concede. We never used decisive force, and our coercive diplomacy did not contain a credible threat until the end. Our military means were not connected to our political goals. Finally, both books argue persuasively that America (or in Ignatieff's case, the West) should not be afraid to lead. Rather than worry about the consequences of hegemony, we should be concerned that we do not engage in enough action around the world – encouraging further unrest and need for U.S. action.

It is still early days for the Bush administration, which in most cases like all new administrations is still following policies inherited from its predecessor. While President Bush campaigned as a realist and would prefer that the U.S. only intervene militarily in the pursuit of U.S. vital interests, it is already apparent that this will not be the case:

- During the first week of the Administration a number of Republican heavyweights sent the President an open letter reminding that promoting human rights is a Republican priority. While President Carter gets the credit or the blame, it is often forgotten that Richard Nixon started the strategy of linking policy goals and human rights with a campaign championing the refuseniks in the Soviet Union. Later, President Reagan

enshrined the concept of U.S. protection, promotion and consolidation of democracy and human rights throughout the world in the Reagan Doctrine.

- The Balkan tar baby continues to beckon: the Administration is backing off of its early stand of bringing home the troops from Kosovo, has expressed strong views on Croat Bosnian separatism, and will no doubt find itself playing a role in Macedonia if the situation deteriorates.

- On March 15, the Hill hosted a meeting of those concerned about the situation in Sudan, where the Muslim government in the north has been oppressing the black Christians in the South for over thirty years. Activists, including many parts of the Republican base, are calling for U.S. intervention, with options ranging from tighter economic sanctions to creating "no-fly" zones, as in Iraq. Later in the week, President Bush responded "We are responsible to stand for human dignity and religious freedom wherever they are denied, from Cuba to China to southern Sudan." Despite Bush's clear statement during the debates that Africa is not a U.S. priority and intervention must be in U.S. vital interests, Sudan is being pushed onto Bush's foreign policy agenda.

These are only a few of early indicators that lead to the conclusion that President Bush will probably be forced into an intervention, and probably a humanitarian intervention, during the course of his tenure in the White House. Bush is a status quo leader; he is not going to lead the country into an era of mutualism, where there is shared power but also shared responsibility, so other countries can pick up the burden. It is unlikely that he will tone down the rhetoric, so that Americans and others do not expect intervention – whether it is sanctions or a "no-fly" zone

Thus, President Bush will almost certainly be faced with the need to make a decision regarding an intervention. The Bush Administration will probably be more disciplined about matching the right military means to its political goals, although the Powell Doctrine may undergo some revisions, particularly regarding the need for an exit strategy, with Powell now at the State Department. In both cases, the Administration will be helped immeasurably by its credibility with the military.

Just as it is doing on other key issues such as missile defense and WMD proliferation. the NSC needs to set in motion a policy review regarding military intervention for humanitarian purposes. The NSC should encourage a broad debate, both on the criteria for a humanitarian intervention and on the subsequent military and civilian implementation of that decision. There are no easy answers; interventions will always be controversial. But such a review should establish a policy framework that makes getting to a better answer about intervention if not easier at least possible in a more timely manner. *Winning Ugly* and *Virtual War* provide policymakers with a good starting point on some of the issues they need to confront in grappling with this issue. Just say "no", just won't cut it anymore.

Masha Yovanovitch